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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 10 TOKYO 003300

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 12/03/08

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- (1) Sankei-FNN poll on Aso cabinet, political parties

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
December 2, 2008

Questions & Answers

(Note) Figures shown in percentage. Figures in parentheses denote findings from a previous Sankei-FNN survey conducted Sept. 25.

Q: Do you support the Aso cabinet?

Yes 27.5 (44.6)
No 58.3 (35.7)

Don't know (D/K) + can't say which (CSW) 14.2 (19.7)

Q: Which political party do you support?

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) 26.7 (31.7)
Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) 23.6 (25.9)
New Komeito (NK) 4.1 (4.1)
Japanese Communist Party (JCP) 2.6 (2.5)
Social Democratic Party (SDP or Shaminto) 1.9 (1.3)
People's New Party (PNP or Kokumin Shinto) 0.4 (0.1)
Reform Club (RC or Kaikaku Kurabu) --- ---
New Party Nippon (NPN or Shinto Nippon) 0.1 (0.1)
Other political parties 0.4 (1.0)
None 38.4 (32.3)
D/K + can't say (C/S) 1.8 (1.0)

Q: Do you appreciate Prime Minister Aso and his cabinet on the following points?

Prime Minister Aso's personal character

Yes 33.1
No 56.7
D/K+CSW 10.2

Prime Minister Aso's leadership

Yes 15.8
No 71.9
D/K+CSW 12.3

Foreign policy

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Yes 28.3
No 47.6
D/K+CSW 24.1

Economic policy

Yes 16.2
No 71.3
D/K+CSW 12.5

Actual results over past 2 months since coming into office

Yes 12.7
No 70.6
D/K+CSW 16.7

Reform policy

Yes 40.7
No 47.5
D/K+CSW 11.8

What Prime Minister Aso has said and done

Yes 12.6
No 78.4
D/K+CSW 9.0

Q: Do you think a government-introduced bill to extend the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean for multinational forces should be passed during the current extended extraordinary session of the Diet?

Yes 43.0
No 41.3
D/K+CSW 15.7

Q: Do you think a government-introduced bill to establish the Consumer Affairs Agency should be passed during the current extended extraordinary session of the Diet?

Yes 52.2
No 25.5
D/K+CSW 22.3

Q: Do you think the government should present a second supplementary budget for economic stimulus measures to the Diet within the year?

Yes 78.1
No 15.4
D/K+CSW 6.5

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Aso and DPJ President Ozawa should have more one-on-one debates?

Yes 67.1
No 27.1
D/K+CSW 5.8

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Aso should shuffle his cabinet as early as possible after the Diet has wound up its current session?

Yes 64.3
No 27.1
D/K+CSW 8.6

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Q: The government has now decided to hand out cash benefits as an economic stimulus measure. Do you think this cash handout should reach all of the people with no restrictions?

Yes 47.8
No 48.5
D/K+CSW 3.7

Q: Do you think Prime Minister Aso's decision on this cash handout was appropriate?

Yes 18.2
No 72.5
D/K+CSW 9.3

Q: Do you think it is too late if this cash handout is in the spring of next year or afterward?

Yes 56.5
No 31.7
D/K+CSW 11.8

Q: Do you think you will receive the cash handout if you are eligible?

Yes 88.3
No 7.6
D/K+CSW 4.1

Q: Who do you think is most appropriate now for Japan's prime minister among the following politicians?

Taro Aso 8.8 (22.6)
Shigeru Ishiba 3.3 (1.6)
Nobuteru Ishiba 5.4 (3.9)
Yuriko Koike 4.7 (4.7)
Kaoru Yosano 2.9 (2.2)
Junichiro Koizumi 11.5 (13.2)
Other ruling party lawmakers 4.1 (1.5)
Ichiro Ozawa 11.4 (16.1)
Naoto Kan 3.7 (3.0)
Yukio Hatoyama 3.4 (1.7)
Katsuya Okada 3.3 (2.1)
Seiji Maehara 2.3 (1.6)
Other opposition party lawmakers 2.4 (2.5)
None 29.2 (18.4)
D/K+C/S 3.6 (4.9)

Q: When comparing Prime Minister Aso and DPJ President Ozawa, which one do you think is more convincing?

Prime Minister Aso 27.9
DPJ President Ozawa 51.5
D/K+CSW 20.6

Q: Which one do you think is stronger in one-on-one debates?

Prime Minister Aso 26.7
DPJ President Ozawa 53.7
D/K+CSW 19.6

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Q: Which one do you think is better when it comes to policies?

Prime Minister Aso 28.3
DPJ President Ozawa 36.4
D/K+CSW 35.3

Q: Which one do you think is trustworthier?

Prime Minister Aso 31.4
DPJ President Ozawa 29.7
D/K+CSW 38.9

Q: Which one do you think is more appealing in election campaigning?

Prime Minister Aso 42.1
DPJ President Ozawa 30.0
D/K+CSW 27.9

Q: Which one do you think is more appropriate for prime minister?

Prime Minister Aso 31.5
DPJ President Ozawa 32.5
D/K+CSW 36.0

Q: The House of Representatives' current membership is up until the fall of next year. When do you think the next election should be held for the House of Representatives?

Within the year 14.8
Early in the new year 28.4
During the first half of next year 27.2
Upon expiry, or sometime before that and during the latter half of next year 25.7
D/K+C/S 3.9

Q: Do you think an election should have been held for the House of Representatives by November?

Yes 49.9
No 41.3
D/K+CSW 8.8

Q: Do you think an election should be held for the House of Representatives after the government has carried out economic stimulus measures?

Yes 73.8
No 19.9
D/K+CSW 6.4

Q: Do you think the U.S. presidential election's results will affect the next election for the House of Representatives?

Yes 59.4
No 35.4
D/K+CSW 5.2

Q: What form of government would you like to see after the next election for the House of Representatives?

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LDP-led coalition government 21.4 (24.1)

DPJ-led coalition government 29.4 (32.1)
Grand coalition involving both the LDP and the DPJ 42.4 (38.5)
D/K+C/S 6.8 (5.3)

Q: Prime Minister Aso's first term of office as LDP president is up until the fall of next year. How long do you think his government will continue?

Replaced before the next election for the House of Representatives 19.5
Replaced after the next election for the House of Representatives 52.8
Replaced upon his term's expiry in the fall of next year 17.8
Continue even after the fall of next year 6.1
D/K+C/S 3.8

Q: Do you think you are a floating voter with no particular party affiliation?

Yes 60.5
No 35.7
D/K+CSW 3.8

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted Nov. 29-30 by the Sankei Shimbun and Fuji News Network (FNN) over the telephone on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. For the survey, a total of 1,000 persons were sampled from among men and women, aged 20 and over, across the nation.

(2) Support ratings for Aso cabinet enter danger zone; Prime Minister Aso should passionately talk about Japan

SANKEI (Page 3) (Full)
December 2, 2008

The rate of public support for Prime Minister Taro Aso's cabinet was 27.5 PERCENT in a poll the Sankei Shimbun and FNN (Fuji News Network) jointly conducted. The Aso cabinet's support rating has now entered a danger zone, only two months after the Aso administration was inaugurated. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition party led by Ichiro Ozawa, is certain to strengthen the offensive in criticizing Aso. Discord has surfaced in the ruling parties.

When his bar-hopping every night was criticized by reporters, Aso snapped back at them. He has misread kanji characters. His counterblast and misreading are charming mistakes. However, he said many doctors lack common sense. Such a slip of the tongue is extremely inappropriate. There is no room for him to excuse.

What is more serious is Aso's making of flip-flops on whether to set an income cap on eligibility for a flat-sum cash payout plan, which is a showcase policy of the Aso administration. The prime minister also corrected later his statement that the government would transfer 1 trillion yen from tax revenues for road projects to local governments in the form of local tax grants. He once said the government's interpretation of the Constitution should be changed. But he later backpedaled.

It can't be helped that former Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

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Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa ridiculed the prime minister, saying, "The prime minister cannot take his remarks back." Statements by the prime minister, the head of the administration, carry incomparably more importance than those of other politicians. If the prime minister wavers in what he says, such will affect many people. As a result, the prime minister will lose the confidence of the people.

Aso should remember why he, the head of a 20-member faction in the LDP, was elected LDP president and prime minister.

Such elements as being a grandson of former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, his dandyish manners, sharp tongue, and jokes might be a factor, but they do not matter much. Since many LDP lawmakers

acknowledged politician Taro Aso's "strong voice," Aso was recommended as a candidate for prime minister.

Aso showed his strong voice during the 2007 LDP presidential election. He was highlighted instead of another presidential candidate Yasuo Fukuda by delivering a grisly speech, even though his defeat was certain because eight factions, excluding the Aso faction, in the LDP had announced their support for Fukuda. Attracted by Aso, many junior and mid-level party members backed him in the election in defiance of decisions of their factions. This led him to the prime minister's post. Fukuda made a heartbreaking decision to hand the reins of government to Aso because he had to entrust Aso with his hope to revitalize the LDP.

Aso thinks of himself as an optimist, and others also regard him that way. Amid the Japanese public's growing concern about their country's economic situation rather than the global financial crisis, Aso was adamant: "Japan is a great country. Japan's potential is enormous." Therefore, the public might have had hopes that he would remove the sense of impasse.

For this reason, Aso should passionately talk about his view of Japan. Rather than talking about how he will to recover the economy, he should talk about how he will build a state and how Japan will take the initiative in the international community. He visited Yasukuni Shrine with his grandfather on April 28, 1952, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty became effective, to report the independence of Japan. He should now recall a sense of mission he felt that day.

(3) Aso cabinet losing momentum two months after inauguration; LDP members worried that LDP will lose election under Aso

ASAHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
December 2, 2008

Public support for Prime Minister Aso has sharply plunged in recent public opinion polls due to a string of gaffes and his policy measures going off track. Seeing such survey results, an increasing number of ruling party members now say that they will lose the next general election under Aso, although he became prime minister because they hoped he could lead the party to an election win. The Aso administration has lost momentum only two months after its inauguration.

Aso secretly called Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Hiroyuki Hosokawa and Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima into a room in the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo on the night of Nov. 19. In the meeting, Aso indicated his lingering attachment to a

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plan to dissolve the Lower House later this year or early next year.

Aware of growing concerns in the LDP that the party would lose power under Aso, Hosoda and Oshima flatly opposed Aso's suggestion. They feared that if they raise the issue of dissolution, the possibility of the LDP becoming an opposition party might take on a realistic touch and the party might eventually begin to fall apart. They were not able to accept the desire of Aso, who wants to keep his grip on the party by hinting at Diet dissolution.

"I would like to make utmost efforts to have the budget law take effect on April 1," Aso said on Nov. 29 in Iwate Prefecture, where Democratic Party of Japan President Ozawa comes from. He thus had to rule out the dissolution of the Lower House until the budget bill for next fiscal year clear the Diet.

Even so, public support for the Aso administration has continued to plunge. In a public opinion survey by Nikkei and another agent on Dec. 1, public support sharply dropped to 31 PERCENT, underscoring that the LDP will not be able to win the election under Aso.

In the LDP, where concerns are intensifying, moves aimed at breaking up the party and reorganizing are expected to become active. Even former Prime Minister Mori, who tried to dissuade junior LDP members from criticizing Aso during a speech on Nov. 30, expressed his

apparent apprehension about the current situation, saying: "The LDP might be pressed to destroy itself and to be drawn into a realignment of the political world."

LDP desperately trying to head off Diet dissolution

Ahead of party head talks between Aso and Ozawa on Nov. 28, Oshima told Aso: "You should not eagerly make personal attacks against Ozawa."

Oshima judged it was necessary to prevent a confrontational mood from being built up in order for the LDP to be able to continue to put off dissolution of the Lower House. Following Oshima's advice, Aso kept a low profile in the party head talks.

The LDP leadership's judgment was that the party should remain on the defensive until the budget bill for next fiscal year is enacted next spring and should accumulate achievements while waiting for an opportunity. Appearing on a TV program on Nov. 30, Hosoda categorically said: "The Lower House will not be dissolved later this year or early next year."

Why is the party leadership so eager to head off Diet dissolution? Perforations that could develop into cracks and cause the party fall apart have already appeared within the LDP. Members remain in the LDP despite different views, because it is a ruling party.

If the prime minister decides to dissolve the Lower House, the possibility of the LDP losing political power as a result of the general election may become a reality. In an effort to survive in the political party, some forces in the party might strengthen their own policy lines and could even grope for ways to join hands with the DPJ. If some members leave the party, the ruling coalition will lose its two-thirds majority in the Lower House and no longer be able to pass legislation through override votes. In such a case, the Aso administration inevitably would immediately be at a standstill

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in the divided Diet.

But the strategy of forcing the prime minister to give up on an early Diet dissolution and remain on the defensive has also produced negative effects.

Aides to Aso were shocked at the opinion survey results released by Nikkei yesterday. Public support for the Aso cabinet plunged 17 points to 31 PERCENT, while non-support soared 19 points to 62 PERCENT. What shocked them more was that 17 PERCENT each picked Aso and Ozawa in reply to a question asking who should be prime minister. In the previous survey, 36 PERCENT picked Aso, while 16 PERCENT chose Ozawa.

In a meeting of the government and LDP Consultative Council yesterday, one aide to the prime minister complained: "Everybody told the premier not to say anything. It was not good." Close aides to Aso believed that his unrestrained remarks were behind his popularity. So they have reacted to the party executive's policy, with one claiming: "He was overly modest. It is undesirable for those close to him to have restricted his deeds and remarks."

The development of the situation beyond the expectations of the party executive and the Prime Minister's Office has caused cracks within the government.

(4) Close cooperation between MSDF, JCG vital in combating Somalia piracy

YOMIURI (Page 15) (Abridged slightly)
December 3, 2008

By Isami Takeda, professor, Dokkyo University

There has been a rash of incidents of piracy in waters off Somalia and the Gulf of Aden northeast of Africa. Some 1,000 vessels were attacked as of the end of November this year. A total of 17 vessels are being held by pirates, and some 250 people are still held

hostage.

Connecting Japan and Europe, this oceanic area is a major trade route where some 20,000 commercial ships pass through annually. Japanese firms manage the operation of over 2,000 commercial vessels. Piracy has a grave impact on marine transport.

Pirates are armed with AK-47s, shoulder-mounted rockets, and other weapons. Usually aboard a small boat from a mother ship disguised as a fishing boat or a cargo ship, pirates attack a vessel, take the crew hostage, and demand an exorbitant ransom. In April this year, the large oil tanker Takayama of Nippon Yusen was attacked by pirates with machine guns. Another tanker linked to a Japanese company was attacked in September. In November, the Japanese captain of a Chinese fishing boat was taken hostage.

At the root of Somalia piracy is the state of anarchy in that nation. Police and military forces do not function in Somalia, which has been in a state of anarchy due to the civil war. Criminal groups in the country are left uncontrolled. Given the country's inability to clamp down on piracy, the international community must deal with the situation.

Adopting two resolutions this year to curb piracy in waters off

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Somalia, the UN Security Council urged various countries to take necessary measures, including one using force. Based on the resolutions, such countries as the United States, European nations, India, and Malaysia have sent naval vessels and military aircraft to the area in question.

In Japan, Prime Minister Taro Aso unveiled before the House of Representatives Antiterrorism Special Committee in October a plan to improve the law to utilize Maritime Self-Defense Force vessels to fight piracy. The step followed a set of proposals by Akihisa Nagashima and other members of the Democratic Party of Japan. A joint effort by the ruling and opposition camps to address the issue of piracy must be welcomed.

The European Union (EU) is scheduled to launch full-fledged anti-piracy operations in December. Japan, too, must take action speedily.

In doing so, the MSDF must work closely with the Japan Coast Guard (JCG).

Piracy is an international crime. Police forces are responsible for cracking down on piracy. Cracking down on piracy at sea falls under the jurisdiction of the JCG. Tracking, investigating, and arresting pirates and seizing evidence require the execution of a series of laws. In order to help out Japanese crewmembers aboard a foreign vessel in a remote place like Somalia, the JCG is allowed to exercise its investigative authority and police powers as long as the vessel is on the high seas. In the wake of the hijacking of the Japanese-owned tanker Alondra Rainbow in 1999, the MSDF dispatched its patrol boats to waters in Southeast Asia.

The MSDF has vessels, including the large patrol boat Shikishima, capable of long-distance cruises. If Japan can dispatch to waters off Somalia some MSDF vessels along with JCG patrol boats, that would help the country display its strong presence and deterrence in the area.

It is quite difficult to exercise police powers against pirates on the high seas. The cases of UK, France, and Denmark testify that.

The MSDF has conducted many joint anti-piracy exercises with relevant countries in the Straits of Malacca. Furthermore, there have been incidents in which JCG patrol boats fired at North Korean spy ships that intruded into Japanese waters. In combating piracy in waters off Somalia, it is essential for the MSDF to collaborate closely with the JCG, which has considerable experience in the field of international crime.

(5) Editorial: Meaning of appointing Clinton to post of secretary of

state

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
December 3, 2008

President-elect Obama announced his cabinet appointees for foreign relations and security affairs in the new administration.

Obama appointed Senator Hillary Clinton to serve as secretary of state. Defense Secretary Gates of the present Bush administration will remain in office. Former North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Commander Jones will take office as national security

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advisor.

How the appointment of Clinton, with whom he staged a fierce battle over the Democratic Party nomination, as secretary of state, will affect the management of the administration is drawing attention. In the U.S., a new administration usually announces cabinet appointees for foreign relations and security affairs first. However, Mr. Obama, whose administration is to be launched amid an economic crisis, gave priority to appointing economic ministers, such as the appointment of Geithner to serve as Treasury secretary, breaking the custom. This is the first such case since the Bill Clinton administration.

The lineup of foreign relations and security-related ministers indicates that Mr. Obama is not slighting that field. Explaining the appointment of Clinton, Obama said, "I will show to my friends and foes in the world my serious determination to reshape U.S. foreign relations and repair alliances." If the appointment of Clinton as secretary of state is proof of change, the selection of defense secretary indicates continuation and stability.

He appears to have taken into account domestic affairs in appointing his cabinet ministers. The appointment of Clinton is intended to maintain the Democratic Party's all-party setup. Returning the Republican Gates as defense secretary is presumably aimed to unite the nation, thereby stabilizing the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan at an early date.

Given U.S. political history, moves similar to power struggles have often occurred in the U.S. with the White House, National Security Council, State Department, and Defense Department aiming to realize policies they think appropriate. It is believed that when the relationship of trust between the president and the secretary of state is strong, this does not occur very often.

It has been believed that former Secretary of State Kissinger during the Nixon administration and Secretary of State Baker during the administration of President George H. W. Bush exemplify such a case. These two cases cannot be likened to the relationship between President-elect Obama and Secretary-designate Clinton, who fiercely confronted Obama during the primary.

There is a video image of Clinton during the primary shouting at Obama, "Shame on you, Barack Obama!"

Vice President-elect Biden has also been picked for his expertise in foreign affairs, which makes the issue more complicated. The future course of relations between Obama and Clinton will be up to what course the new Obama administration will take.

SCHIEFFER